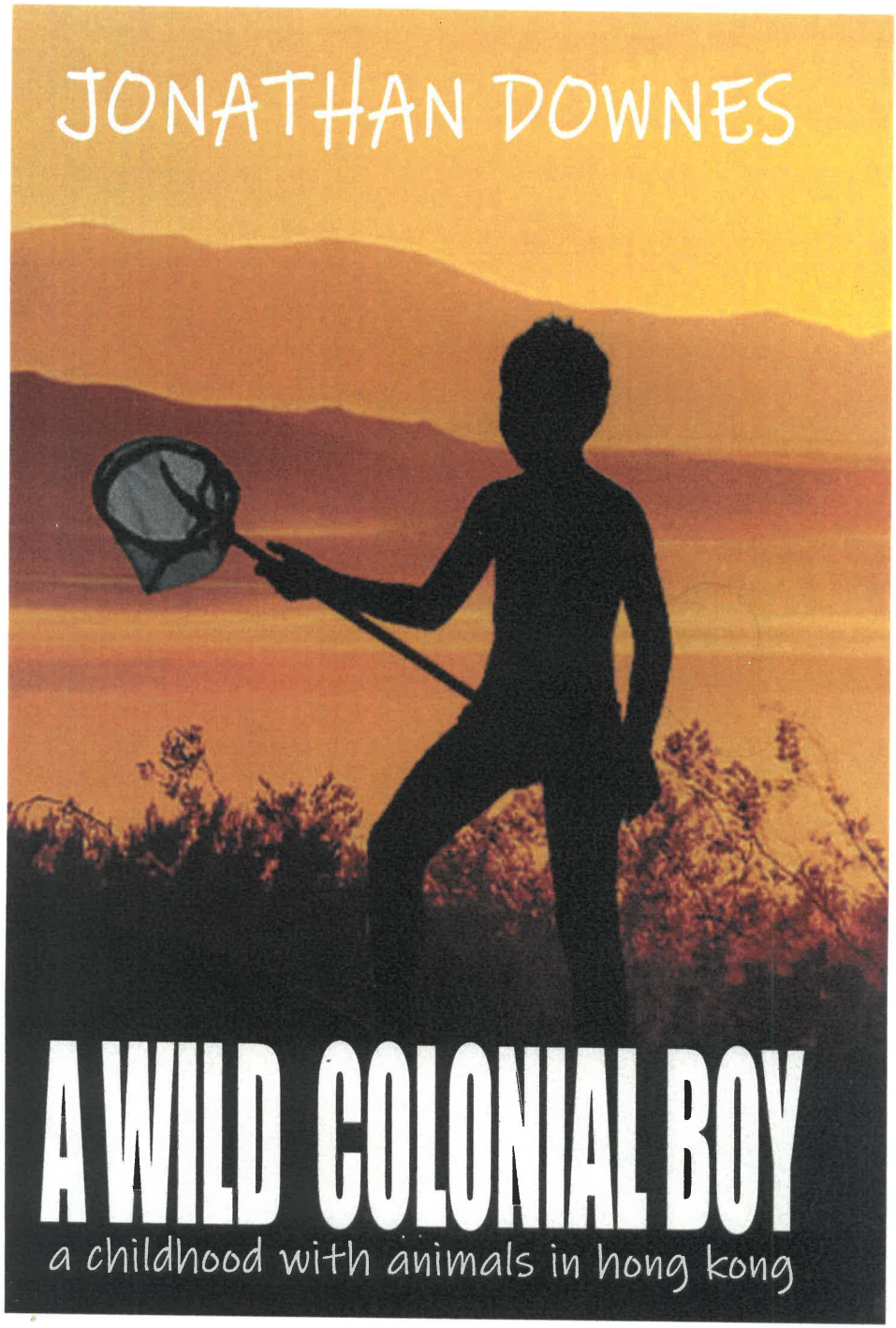


Flying Snake
A Journal of
Cryptozoology, Folklore and Forteana
December 2020 Vol 6 Number 18 £3.99

Elephant Shrew Rediscovered . New species of Owl in Trinidad . Meet The Centaur . Albino Hedgehog . Forteana from Fate . Genets in the UK . Singing dogs rediscovered . The Metallica Snake . Weird Jumping Porcupines

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

Flying Snake appears about twice a year depending on the time I can find to research for items to include in it and whether or not I have recovered from dancing `The Poot` at Macclesfield`s clubs and pubs. Cover price is £3.99, £ 12 for 3 issues, please send a check for £3.99 etc to Richard Muirhead NOT Flying Snake, to:

112 High St

Macclesfield

SK11 7QQ

UK

I do not accept payments using non UK currencies, bank orders etc.

Co-Editors are Carl Marshall (U.K.) & Mike Hardcastle (Australia)

Back issues available at £3.99 each on request.

Pay Pal payments: richardmuirhead66@outlook.com

For further info on Flying Snake see https://www.cosmicpolymath.com/blog

Contributions on all obscure aspects of cryptozoology, Forteana & folklore welcome at Editor`s say-so.

Please contact me for information about back issues and re-producing articles. Money orders and checks not accepted from abroad, please use Google to convert your national currency to pounds sterling. Full colour pdfs of Flying Snake from this issue on-wards can be sent to your e-mail inbox at £3.99 per copy.

Essays extoling the occult,racism,sexism will never be considered. Photocopies of previous articles available at author`s and my dis-cretion.

CONTENTS

Dr Devo`s Diary 4

Digging Up A Burrowing Cat Karl Shuker 5-9

Another One Bites The Oar Ulrich Magin
10 – 15

Camels For Arizona Dorothy D. Anderson
16 — 17

Animals and Cryptids of the Great Smokey Mountains
Kate Shaw

18—29

Meet the Centaur Loes Modderman
30—41

Damned Transatlantic Vagrant Birds Richard George
42 – 45

Letters and E-mails 46—50

Notes & Queries 51-70

Letters to Fate magazine 71-75

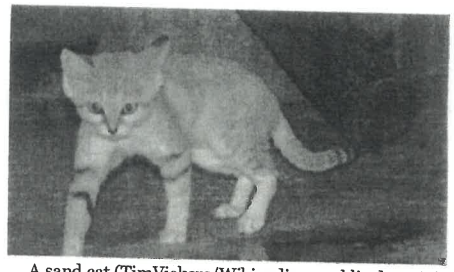
Dr Devo's Diary

Well of course the non-cryptozoological news has been dominated by Covid 19 and there is very little cheer as I write this in late September on that front, though I was told a story dating from around March during the first wave of the virus in the U.K of how a family of ducks including ducklings was filmed walking (waddling?) down the usually very busy Buxton Road in Macclesfield. So I suppose every cloud has a silver lining. On the cryptozoological front, this issue contains an exciting range of stories from flying porcupines to centaurs and lions in Worcestershire in the Nineteenth Century.During the Summer I began a subscription to a family history web site called Find My Past UK (findmypast.co.uk) which apart from being very useful in genealogy is also very useful in finding cryptozoology nuggets as there is a searchable archive of old British,Irish and American and world newspapers to look through. I found the story of a giant lizard in the Solomon Islands during World War 2 using Find My Past. There has been a mini spate of discoveries of new species of animals or re-discoveries of animals thought to have been extinct, such as a race of dogs in New Guinea. Whales have been behaving strangely, such as the case in Tasmania in of a mass stranding of almost 400 pilot whales in September and orcas attacking boats off the coast of Portugal and Spain in September and October. I wonder if both these sad occurrences are due to stress or disease or both?Ulrich Magin (who has a feature in this issue of Flying Snake) has kindly been promoting FS for me amongst the community who read the new journal Jahrbuch fur Kryptozoologie,this community being Network for Cryptozoology based in Germany. Since issue 17 of Flying Snake was published I have bought a few interesting books, such as Strange Dwellings by J.G. Wood and Cuckoo Problems by E.C.Stuart Baker, which I bought in York in August. I have also been swapping books with Carl Marshall, obtaining the classic Earth Lights by Paul Devereux.

DIGGING UP A BURROWING CAT

SHUKER NATURE BLOG

AUGUST 30TH 2020



A sand cat (TimVickers/Wikipedia – public domain)

I am greatly indebted to English cryptozoological researcher Richard Muirhead for bringing to my attention an extremely curious report published on 26 January 1925 by the *Leeds Mercury*. It concerns what was referred to by the report as a burrowing cat. but what it truly was could well be another matter entirely. Here is the report in question:

A "Burrowing" Cat.

Captain Buchanan was engaged on scientific work, for Lord Rothschild and the British Museum, and brought back some remarkable relics of his journey through the heart of the

Sahara.

His collection was the first brought from there.

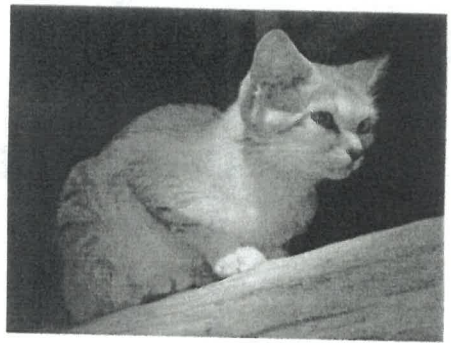
One of the most valuable specimens was the skin of a "burrowing cat," the only specimen in any collection in the world.

This animal greatly resembles a cat, but is able to burrow like a rabbit. It is beautifully marked, has a fine coat, and lynx-like ears.

Captain Buchanan started from Lagos, Nigeria, travelled up country about 700 miles to Cano, and then struck across the vast desert to Algiers.

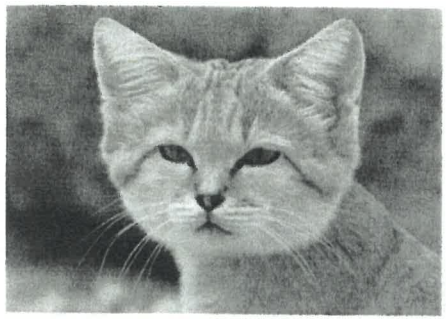
Captain Angus Buchanan as depicted on a vintage picture postcard from my personal collection (public domain)

Captain Buchanan was Captain Angus Buchanan MC, the famous British explorer who (with his cameraman) was the first white explorer to cross the Sahara by camel. So, assuming that the above report is genuine and not journalistic hokum (but its specific naming of Buchanan, his zoologist sponsor Lord Walter Rothschild, and the British Museum suggests that it is indeed genuine), what could this odd-sounding creature be?



Sand cats are specifically adapted for desert life and can be found in burrows (TimVickers/Wikipedia – public domain)

When reading the report, I immediately thought of the sand cat *Felis margarita*, a small species that does inhabit the Sahara and is in fact the world's only known felid adapted for desert life. Some (although not all) specimens are handsomely marked with stripes and spots, and its ears can appear pointed and therefore somewhat reminiscent of a lynx's. Moreover, it does indeed retreat into burrows when the prevailing temperature is too extreme.



The ears of the sand cat can appear pointed, especially when viewed at certain angles (Clément Bardot/Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 4.0 licence)

However, the sand cat's existence was known to science long before 1925 (it was formally named in 1858), with many specimens already preserved in museums worldwide. So if it were a sand cat, the report's claim that Buchanan's was the first specimen in any collection is very mystifying.

Are the mysterious burrowing cat and the desert-inhabiting sand cat one and the same species? (TimVickers/Wikipedia – public domain)

4 COMMENTS

1. LUCA Now I want one just look at that face.
2. GYTALF2000 Fascinating!
3. NARA

   Slightly off topic, but I was looking for public domain photos of white tigers and stumbled upon this: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:First_white_tiger_mohan.jpg The uploader claims it's a photo of THE Mohan. I have never seen this photo, or any photos of Mohan. Do you know if it's truly that famous cat?

4. DR KARL SHULKER I haven't seen this photo before either, but as Mohan was captured in 1951 and was the last-known white tiger caught in the wild to be maintained alive in captivity thereafter (all subsequent captive white tigers have been bred in captivity), and as photography was well advanced by then, I'd be very surprised if no photos of such a historic animal as Mohan existed. Whether this particular photo is of Mohan I cannot say; its provenance would need to be investigated and revealed.

This blog has been reproduced with the permission of Dr Karl Shuker.

Another one bites the Oar

Ulrich Magin

In chapter 5 of "Wild Talents", Charles Fort rejects often repeated yarns as conventional lies:

"But it is not that I take numerous repetitions, as a standard for admission– The fellow who found the pearl in the oyster stew–the old fiddle that turned out to be a Stradivarius—the ring that was lost in a lake, and then what was found when a fish was caught–

But these often repeated yarns are conventional yarns.

And almost all liars are conventionalists."

But is it always that easy?

The most famous observation of Morag, the monster of Loch Morar in Scotland, was reported in 1969. On 16 August, at 9:30 pm, but still light, Duncan McDonnell and William Simpson, two local men, went fishing in a boat. They heard a disturbance in the water, and then perceived a large creature approaching them. In seconds, the animal's hump struck the boat, and McDonnell grabbed the oar in an attempt to fight it off. What happened then was described in sensational terms by newspapers all over the world: "McDonell said he jammed an oar at the Loch Morar monster" and it "bit the end off the oar" (1), or even "The Loch Ness monster may have a rival with a piece of chewed oar in its mouth" (2)

Actually, as McDonnell explained to researcher Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell, the oar, being rather old, simply broke when he hit the creature. The monster only dived below the waves after McDonnell shot at it with his rifle. (3)

Although generally treated as a one-off story, this oar-chewing encounter with Morag is actually the third case of a lake monster (allegedly) biting into an oar – or the third case that I am aware of, as others may hide among the several thousand lake monster reports globally that are known.

On 24 June 1892, the Wisconsin newspaper *Madison Tribune* reported the exiting adventure of Billy Dunn and his wife on Lake Mendota, Wisconsin, in June 1892. Dunn and his wife were fishing on the lake

on a warm day when they noticed a dark object approaching their boat. As it closed in, they observed it was a huge, green snake with large white spots, its head sticking out of the water for several feet, which greatly agitated the water. The serpent headed directly at them and seemed dangerous. Then it attacked. "Dunn was equal to the occasion and seizing an oar, awaited the attack. The serpent with a fierce hiss sprang upon the boat, but only to fall back partially stunned by the well-aimed blow of the fisherman. The oar could not be withdrawn, however, before the coils of the snake surrounded it with its firm embrace. … the reptile, recovering from the blow, had darted its long black fangs entirely through the blade. Now was Dunn's opportunity, and as the monster was struggling to disentangle its teeth from the wood, he rained blow after blow upon it with a hatchet he carried by his side, until the snake gave up the contest, uncoiled itself and sank beneath the waters."

According to the newspaper, Dunn kept his oar and showed the fangs in it to everybody willing to take a look. Dunn was unable to estimate the size of the "monster", but we might infer that it hardly had the dimensions usually attributed to lake monsters. (4)A few months later, it was Lake Erie's turn. "We colonists can boast that we have done our best in the matter of sea-serpent yarns, and that under the Southern Cross we have added not a little to the literature bearing on these supposititious monsters of the deep. We cannot hope, however, to compete with America in the sea-serpent story industry, for when Uncle Sam sets out to spin a tall sea-snake yarn the rest of the world is nowhere, I guess. As witness the following 'very latest' from Yankeeland:– 'Again, the sea serpent. This periodical scare has been renewed on the River St. Lawrence by the appearance of a hideous monster. Geo. Parke and wife, who live at Brady's Bay, Wolfe's Island, were out sailing on Sunday evening, July 17th, according to a despatch of the 22nd from Kingston, Ontario, when they heard a noise as if something was rushing through the water with great speed. They looked for the cause of the disturbance and beheld what was to them an awful sight. A serpent of huge size was making for the boat. It had its head in the air, and its eyes looked like balls of fire. The reptile meant business, and Mr Parks knew that if he did not make a defence, he and his wife would be up-et [sic] and probably drowned. He rose in his boat and waited for the enemy. When it got within striking distance, the battle commenced. Mrs Parke screamed for help at the top of her voice, while her husband

bruised the serpent's head with a fish-pole. The reptile dodged about the boat for some time and then disappeared with a noise like a buzz-saw. Mrs Parks thinks it was the devil in disguise.'' (5)

In 1916, at Darwin, Australia, a monster bit an oar and even let its teeth behind in the wood. (6)

A strikingly similar story was told nearly 50 years later, this time from Ireland. I first learned of this 1944 report from a brief, and quite sensational, report in the Madrid newspaper *ABC*:

"Marine monster in an Irish Lake. London, 19, 1 pm. In an Irish lake a marine monster has surfaced, says the newspaper 'Daily Mail.' It has the form of a serpent and measures more than ten metres in length. It was discovered by some fishermen who surprised it as it slept on some rocks. The monster, upon being awakened, attacked the boat of the fishermen, but they defended themselves with the oars of their boat and managed to escape. Two hours later, several hunters went out in pursuit of the serpent and wounded it with rifle bullets on several occasions. However, after only a short time it was observed swimming at full speed at the other end of the lake. The people of the region, the 'Daily Mail' added, will organize a great hunt to see if they will manage to kill the monster. – EFE" (7)

I haven't been able to locate the "Daily Mail" story and I am certain I haven't read of this case elsewhere. When google news archive still worked, I found, from the "Baltimore Sun" (8), this stump: "Irish Farmer Takes Shot At Lake 'Monster' London, Aug. 28 (Reuter) [The] monster of Dromate Lake, County Monaghan, Eire, reappeared again today to be shot at by a farmer and then to after putting an end to …"

Therefore, there should have been several observations. The second clip, in full, is from a Canadian paper which is more obsessed by its own lake creatures: country of County Monaghan, up near the Ulster border, where the "Little People" hold sway, came today the story of an intrepid group of farmers who set out to slay the monster of Dromate Lake and, it was reported, got within two yards and a missed rifle bullet of doing so.

From Inverness in the highlands of Scotland, guardian of the Loch Ness monster, came protests from Scots who know a good thing when they see it at the folly of the Eire farmers who thus would pass up a

chance to earn an honest baubee. In far-off British Columbia, too, tellers of the tales of Cadborosaurus and Ogopogo shook their heads at such goings on.

The brief but graphic dispatch from Dromate lake neglected to identify the fearless farmers, four men who set out in a row-boat deliberately to shoot the monster, described as about seven feet in length with two arms with webbed or clawed feet and a tail 18 inches long. One rifle was in the boat, carried by the 30-year-old leader of the expedition.

The leader, who has spent all his life on the shores of Dromate Lake and knew the hazards of the chase, was quoted as saying the boat got within two yards of the underwater denizen. Then he said: "Seeing it over the edge (of the boat) I fired. It gave a splash and raised a big wave on the water. Then it disappeared."

The harsh treatment accorded to the monster of County Monaghan was in contrast to the affection held by British Columbia citizens for Cadborosaurus – "Caddy" to Vancouver Islanders – and Ogopogo, inhabitant of Okanagan Lake in the interior of the province. Caddy, described variously as from 20 to 50 feet in length, has sported freely up and down the Western Canadian coast over the years. Smaller, and less frequently in the news, is 15-foot Ogopogo who has one thing in common with the Loch Ness monster: He has humps." (9)By the way, I haven't been able to trace any Dromate Lake or Lough in Monaghan, perhaps Dromore Lough at the border to Co. Cavan is meant. This may indicated by another version of the store I located in *Shipbuilding and Shipping Record* (10):

"A monster, estimated to be 15 ft. long and which is said to dive with a rumbling noise (behaviour which Southern Englanders will readily recognise) is disturbing the peace of Lake Dromate, near Newbliss.

It was first noticed by some men fishing from the lake shore. Farmers, armed with guns, searched for it and, to their surprise, it broke surface about 20 yards from their boat. Six shots were fired at the 'monster,' but, like its more famous cousin of Loch Ness, it continues to appear. '*Daily Sketch.*'"

In a New Zealand paper I found the fullest story yet:

A 'MONSTER' APPEARS. EXCITEMENT IN EIRE

A 'monster' which has appeared in Dromate Lake in County Monaghan Eire, has caused many Irishmen to forget the war for a little while. It would appear to be a young relative of the. Loch Ness monster, states an English newspaper.

Several anglers claim to have seen the creature during the last month and a farmer who has lived near the lake for 30 years saw it about two yards away and shot at it. The farmer said that although he could not see the full body of the monster, it seemed to be about seven feet long with two arms with claws, or webbed feet, attached. Its tail was about 18 inches long and six inches broad. The appearance of the monster put a sudden end to swimming in the lake and only a few anglers were brave enough to venture out in a boat. Every night local farmers armed with shotguns go out in boats in search of this strange fish and in the hope of catching sight of it. Crowds throng the shores of the lake at the week-ends." (11) No mention of oars here, though.

This Irish incident (fighting with oar, shooting) so much resembles the classic Loch Morar case that I think one should learn more about it. Generally, a lake monster approaching to a distance where it can be hit with an oar is a rare occurrence, so these examples all sound like variations of one traditional tale; however, I am not aware of any folklore story that mirrors it. Perhaps it is only natural that one, when close to a beast of such size, will defend one's life with an oar. (12)

Notes

1. *Huntingdon Daily News*, 19 August 1969, p. 1; *Norwalk Hour*, 18 August 1969, p. 1 & 2

2. *Pacific Stars And Stripes*, 20 August 1969, p. 5

3. Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell: The *Search for Morag*. Tom Stacey: London 1972, p. 138–140

4. quoted after Archie Eschborn: *The Dragon in the Lake*. Xlibris 2006, p. 357.

5. RANDOM SHOTS. Auckland Star, 24 September 1892, p. 2

6. Malcolm Smith: *Bunyips and Bigfoots*. Millennium Books 1996, p. 35 ff.

7. Monstruo marino en una laguna irlandesa, *ABC*, Madrid, 20

August 1944, p. 16)

8. *Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1944

9. *Calgary Herald*, 29 August 1944

10. *Shipbuilding and Shipping Record*, vol 64, 1944, p. 198

11. *Bay of Plenty Beacon*, 12 January 1945, p. 6

12. Further examples can be found in Janet and Colin Bord's *Alien Animals* (Panther 1985, p. 25) from Storsjö in Sweden on 2 August 1973; and in June P. O'Neill's *Great New England Sea Serpent* (Paraview 2003, p. 135). That the oar that hits the monster can be a real-life event is evidenced by instances where people hit attacking sharks with an oar or paddle, as on 7 September 1974 off North Beach, Eilat, Israel. Another shark bit the rudder of a boat off Corulla, New South Wales, and bites into water skis and paddles were said to be common in Sydney, see Hans Hass, *Wie Haie wirklich sind* (Munich: dtv 1986, p. 71, 88, 151)

Animals and Cryptids of the Great Smoky Mountains

by **Kate Shaw** of Strange Animals Podcast
(strangeanimalspodcast.blubrry.net)

The Great Smoky Mountains is a subrange of the Appalachian Mountains, which stretches from the middle of Alabama in the southern United States north into southeastern Canada. The Appalachians formed when the world's continents crunched together to form the supercontinent Pangaea. The southern Appalachians formed separately and later than the northern Appalachians, around 270 million years ago.

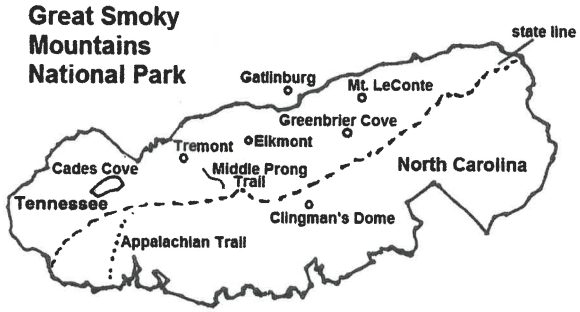


Fig 1 Map of Great Smoky National Park

The Appalachians were once as high as the Rockies or Himalayas, but by the time the dinosaurs went extinct, they had eroded down to the mountain cores. Sediment weathered from the peaks and filled in valleys. But during the Pleistocene, when massive glaciers covered the northern parts of North America, the weight of the ice pushed the North American plate down, causing the southern part of the plate to rise. Eventually the ancient mountains' roots were a thousand feet (305 m) above sea level again. Rivers that once flowed east into the Atlantic Ocean or west into the remains of the shallow Western Interior Seaway shifted their courses to flow northward. Streams that once meandered across the land now plunged down steep slopes and dug gorges into the rock. And over thousands of years, animals and plants retreating from the ice migrated southward along the mountain range.

When the climate warmed some 21,000 years ago and the ice age glaciers melted, many cold-adapted species were trapped in the peaks of the southern Appalachians. One of the highest peaks is Mount LeConte, with its highest point, High Top, measured at 6,593 ft (2,010 m). I hiked Mount LeConte on 7 May 2016 when the weather in nearby Knoxville, Tennessee was a warm 82 Fahrenheit (27.8 Celcius). There was snow on the mountain that morning, deep enough that I wrote my name in it. A spruce-fir forest grows on the upper slopes, a remnant of forest that grew throughout the mountains during the last ice age. The climate at the peak of Mount LeConte is more like that of southern Canada than the warm, humid southeastern United States.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established in 1934 to protect the mountains along the Tennessee/North Carolina border. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve. No one lives in the park's 800 square miles [2,072 square km], which receives up to 90 inches [2.29 m] of rain a year, some of it from hurricanes that sweep up from the southern Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico. Large tracts of old-growth forest (some 150 square kilometers) still remain in the park too. So as you can see, the Smokies are a biodiversity hotspot. In 2018, the park announced its 1,000th species discovered that is new to science, which by July 2020 had grown to 1,025. Overall, 20,000 known species live in the park as of 2019 and scientists estimate that up to 100,000 more are yet to be discovered.

The Smokies are heavily forested, of course, but some mountain summits and crests have no trees. Instead, native grasses and shrubs grow. These open areas are called grassy balds and no one is sure why they exist. The prevailing theory is that Pleistocene megaherbivores opened the forests for grazing, and after their extinction some 11,000 years ago, the balds remained open due to bison, elk (wapiti), and deer. When white settlers moved into the area, they used the balds to graze cattle and other livestock. Remains of mammoth and mastodon, musk ox, ground sloth, and other megaherbivores have been excavated from various balds throughout the park.

The Carolina northern flying squirrel was one of the species whose ancestors migrated south along the Appalachians during the Pleistocene. After temperatures started to warm, the cold-adapted flying squirrel migrated north again, but some populations remained on mountaintops in the Smoky Mountains. They have been isolated for thousands of years, evolving into a subspecies of flying squirrel found only in high elevations of the Smokies. It's much rarer than the southern flying squirrel that lives throughout the southeastern United States, and prefers spruce forests instead of the hardwood forests that southern flying squirrels like. But the spruce forests are threatened by climate change, the introduced balsam woolly adelgid insect that kills fir trees, and pollution.

The world's smallest tarantula is also endangered as the fir trees die. The spruce-fir moss spider (*Microhexura montivaga*) grows about four millimeters across and lives in moss mats on boulders in Fraser fir and red spruce forests, a cold and intensely moist microhabitat. The tiny tarantula was put on the endangered species list in 1995. It lives only in high elevations in the Smokies, and the entire remaining population may be limited to a few boulders on the North Carolina side of the park.

Amphibian enthusiasts call the Smokies the Salamander Capital of the World, with 30 known species. Largest of these is the hellbender, a giant salamander that can grow nearly 2 ½ feet long (74 cm) and which lives in swift-moving mountain streams. It's most closely related to the Chinese and Japanese giant salamanders, which live in Asia and can grow over twice as long as the hellbender. Twenty-seven of the salamanders found in the Smokies are lungless, in the family *Plethodontidae*. Instead of breathing with lungs or gills, the lungless salamanders absorb oxygen through the skin. Of these, the red-

-cheeked salamander is endemic to the Smokies.

There are numerous caves and cave systems throughout the Smokies, all of them in lower elevations since the higher elevations are formed of hard metamorphic rocks that were thrust above layers of softer limestone and dolostone. While all caves in the park are off-limits to visitors for safety and conservation reasons, scientists do undertake biological assessments of caves occasionally. A 2002 inventory of Gregory Cave (in Cades Cove) resulted in the discovery of 46 arthropods and crustaceans, including one (an amphipod, *Stygobromus fecundus*) endemic to the cave. Other caves are home to known endemic species of spider and cricket, and probably many more since some caves have never had biological inventories done.

Bobcats still live in the Smokies, but the last cougar, or mountain lion, was supposedly killed in 1920. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the eastern cougar subspecies from the endangered species list in 2018, since it is considered extinct. But sightings continue in the Smokies, close to a dozen a year. Some sightings are compelling, like the 2002 report of a cougar crossing a road in the park, spotted by a veterinarian who treated captive cougars in his practice. Considering how seldom seen the bobcat is despite it being relatively abundant, it's possible that a small number of cougars live in the park—either animals that have moved back into the mountains from elsewhere, or a relict population.

The red wolf is native to the eastern United States and was once common in the Smoky Mountains, but was extirpated by white settlers throughout most of its range. Where it remained in the wild, it interbred with closely related coyotes, until it was declared extinct in the wild in 1980. Fortunately, by then a captive breeding program was in place. Starting in 1991, 37 red wolves were released in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee, following the release of 63 red wolves into the Alligator River Natural Area in North Carolina a few years earlier. But the release didn't go well in the Smokies. Wolves are shy and need enormous territories with lots of game. Before long some wolves were leaving the park and attacking livestock. Others died of parvo virus, especially wolf pups.

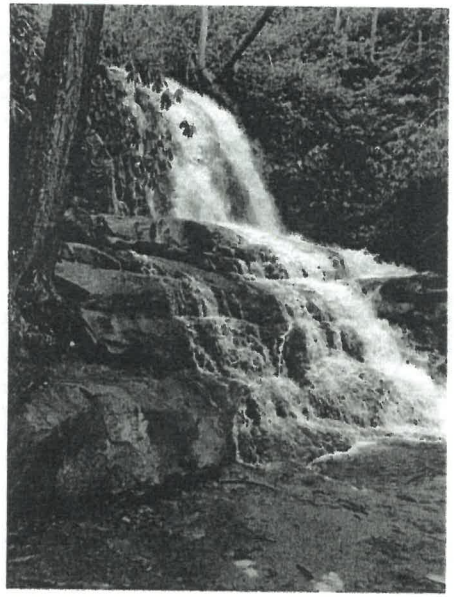


Fig 2 . Laurel Falls © Janice McClelland

Fig 3 The view from Mount LeConte..© Katherine Shaw

Worse, this was about the same time that coyotes moved into the area from the west. The wolves started interbreeding with the coyotes, and the coyotes also competed with the wolves for food. In 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ended the program and recaptured all but one of the wolves originally released into the park.

The North Carolina release went better, with a population peak in 2006 estimated at nearly 130 wolves. But that program was suspended in 2015, and without management of the wild population, the number has dwindled. As of 2019, only 14 wolves remain in North Carolina—and that's the entire population of red wolves in the wild.

But sightings of red wolves continue in the Smokies. The trouble is that the red wolf looks very similar to the coyote. It's taller and larger, with a more pronounced reddish-brown shade to its coat, but even experts can have trouble telling the two species apart if they can't get a good look at the animal. Most likely people are seeing coyotes, possibly ones descended from red wolf/coyote hybrids born during the reintroduction program.

There are other mysteries in the Smokies besides animals that might or might not live there, or ones that haven't been discovered by scientists. There are many stories of lost silver or even gold mines in the park. One story goes that a blacksmith named Perry Shults discovered gold in upper Greenbrier Cove near Webb Creek. Shults was a real person who did receive a mining license in 1867, and he did apparently make a good living from it. But whether he was actually melting down gold nuggets to make counterfeit coins is a matter of debate. You'd think the gold would be valuable enough without turning it into coins, but his license to mine included silver but not gold. Maybe he couldn't figure out a better way to make money off illegally mined gold. Supposedly, Federal agents traced the counterfeit coins to Shults, who either hid in the mountains for the rest of his life or headed west. Either way, Shults was the only one who knew where the mine entrance was located, and when he died, the mine was lost.

In 1967, a man named Walt Rice, who owned the old Shults property, supposedly found a buried clay pot while plowing his garden. The pot was full of gold and silver coins valued at $37,000. A treasure trove of that sort should have been all over the local newspapers, but I haven't found anything about it from 1967.

Fig 4. Hike down from Mount LeConte.. © Katherine Shaw

But the biggest (literally) mystery in the park is the occasional sighting of a Bigfoot-type creature. Most sightings are probably bears. An estimated 1,500 American black bears live in the Smokies, and while some bears get used to hikers and tourists, most are shy and seldom seen. A black bear keeping an eye on hikers or cars will sometimes stand on its hind legs for a better view, and would naturally look like a hulking humanoid if glimpsed. But other sightings aren't so easy to explain.

In February of 2009, a photographer named Deb Campbell was hiking the Middle Prong Trail in the snow. The Middle Prong Trail passes three major waterfalls and many smaller ones as it follows along a tributary of the Little River. She had the trail almost completely to herself—she says she only saw one person the whole time. She reported, "[A]t some point I am photographing along the stream and I start to smell a gawd awful stench. Not really like anything I had ever smelled before. I look around, see nothing, listen intently… nothing. So I finish up at that spot and go further up the trail." The smell receded behind her but the snow increased, so finally she turned around to hike out. Around the area where she smelled the stink earlier, she started feeling watched. She stopped long enough to secure her camera gear for much faster hiking in slick conditions when she heard a deep growl that she described as "very low, not like a cat, almost guttural." Needless to say, she got off the mountain as quickly as possible.

The black bear doesn't truly hibernate since its body temperature remains normal instead of dropping, but it does find a den in cold weather and will sleep for long stretches. It may emerge from its den occasionally during the winter during warm spells, but for the most part it's asleep in its den from around November through March in the Smoky Mountains. But Campbell was hiking in February during a snowfall, with snow already on the ground. A bear would most likely not be out of its den in that weather unless it had been disturbed.

And bears don't typically smell bad. During the winter hibernation most bears don't defecate at all. Any feces left in a bear's digestive tract hardens to form a fecal plug. If it does feel the need to defecate near the end of the winter, it will do so just outside its den, but the fecal plug has very little odor. Even under ordinary conditions, unless a bear has been eating carrion or rooting around in garbage bins, it will smell no worse than a dog that needs a bath.

Not only that, black bears don't actually growl. They make grunty, huffing noises when warning people away or when males fight in the summer, and a frightened bear will moan, but they don't make a dog-like growling.

It's possible that Campbell hiked past a bear that had emerged from its den early and had found and eaten carrion, possibly roadkill, and that she was so close to the bear without seeing it that she smelled its breath. That's almost more frightening than the thought of passing near a Bigfoot. The growl might have come from a different animal, a coyote or (who knows?) maybe even a red wolf. Or Campbell might have encountered a creature sometimes called a skunk ape due to its foul odor.

The skunk ape is most commonly reported in Florida swamps, but sightings—or smellings—have come from many other states. The smell is sometimes described as that of rotting food and roadkill on a hot day.

It's hard to believe that a bear would be actively foraging so much in winter that it would smell like garbage. January and February are the depths of winter in East Tennessee. The bears are hibernating, not foraging. So Campbell's encounter remains a mystery.

References

Amphibians. (2019, November 20). NPS.gov (U.S. National Park Service). https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/amphibians.htm

Birth of the mountains: The geologic story of the southern Appalachian mountains. (n.d.). U.S. Geological Survey Publications Warehouse. https://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/birth/birth.pdf

Campbell, D. (2009, June 4). *What is the most unusual thing you have seen in the Smokies?* GoSmokies. https://gosmokies.knoxnews.com/forum/topics/what-is-the-most-unusual-thing?id=1060157%3ATopic%3A51182&page=3#comments *[Accessed August 12, 2020.]*

Carolina northern flying squirrel. (2011, December). U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service. https://www.fws.gov/southeast/pdf/fact-sheet/carolina-northern-flying-squirrel.pdf

Carolina northern flying squirrel. (2019, March 25). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. https://www.fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/mammals/carolina-northern-flying-squirrel/

Do Black bears growl? (2019, March 28). North American Bear Center. https://bear.org/do-black-bears-growl/

Hrala, J. (2016, September 22). *Do bears poop when they're hibernating?* ScienceAlert. https://www.sciencealert.com/this-is-how-bears-hibernate-without-having-to-poop

Johnson, B. (2013, December 1). *Debunking mountain mysteries*. Smoky Mountain Living. https://www.smliv.com/stories/debunking-mountain-mysteries/

Kays, H. (2019, October 1). *A conversation with the Smokies' mountain lion expert*. Smoky Mountain Living. https://www.smliv.com/outdoors/smokies-mountain-lions/

Linzey, D.W. (2008). *A natural history guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Univ. of Tennessee Press.

Mahaney, J. (2004). *Hell-bent for adventure: Coal mines & goldmines, U-boats & Bill Clinton's mail*. AuthorHouse.

Nickell, J. (2014, July 14). *Tracking Florida's skunk ape*. Skeptical Inquirer. https://skepticalinquirer.org/newsletter/tracking-floridas-skunk-ape/

Nolfi, D.C. (2011). National Park Service cave and karst resources management case study: Great Smoky Mountains National Park (1053) [Master's thesis]. https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2056&context=theses.

Red wolf. (2018, July). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. https://www.fws.gov/southeast/pdf/fact-sheet/red-wolf.pdf

Report: 20,000 Square miles of red wolf habitat is open for urgently needed reintroductions. (2019, October 29). Center for Biological Diversity. https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/report-20000-square-miles-red-wolf-habitat-open-urgently-needed-reintroductions-2019-10-29/

Rogers, L., & Mansfield, S. (2010, February 9). *Do black bears stink?* Wildlife Research Institute. https://www.bearstudy.org/website/updates/daily-updates/814-update-february-9-2010-1050-am-cst-.html

Schneider, J. (2017, October 19). Farewell to the world's smallest tarantula? National Wildlife Federation. https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2017/Oct-Nov/Conservation/Spruce-Fir-Moss-Spider

Tilley, S. G., & Huheey, J. E. (2004). Reptiles & amphibians of the Smokies. Great Smoky Mountains Association.

Uplift, erosion, uplift, erosion: A compressed history of Appalachia. (2002, March 1). Appalachian Voices. https://appvoices.org/2002/03/01/2927/

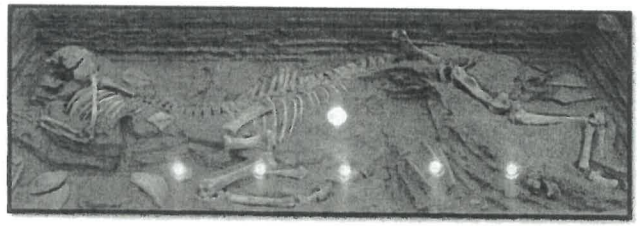
Weigl, P. D., & Knowles, T. W. (1995). Megaherbivores and southern Appalachian grass balds. *Growth and Change, 26*(3), 365-382.

Meet the Centaur

Loes Modderman

Recently I stumbled upon research done on the anatomy of the Centaur.
Which is, to say the least, remarkable.
Most, if not all of us are convinced the Centaur is, regrettably, a mythical creature.
His strong physique has been depicted on multiple Greek vases, Roman sculptures and Renaissance paintings. Recently the worthy Centaur made a comeback in Harry Potter and from there in computer games. The Centaur is still galloping - in a sense.
But he isn't real. Never has been. At least not in this dimension.
Science has told us repeatedly that what doesn't exist doesn't need to be researched, right?
But Prof. Dr. Reinhard V. Putz from the university of Munich, Germany, thought otherwise.
The worthy scientist did what few did before him: he started studying Centaur-art and managed to collect 'a wealth of data' , although, he admits, it would have been better to have a life specimen to study.
We understand that. But then he should have made a different choice.
The professor did well nonetheless, with the material he had. I imagine he went to musea measuring up the equine legs, the human torso, the facial expressions and everything else that makes up a Centaur.

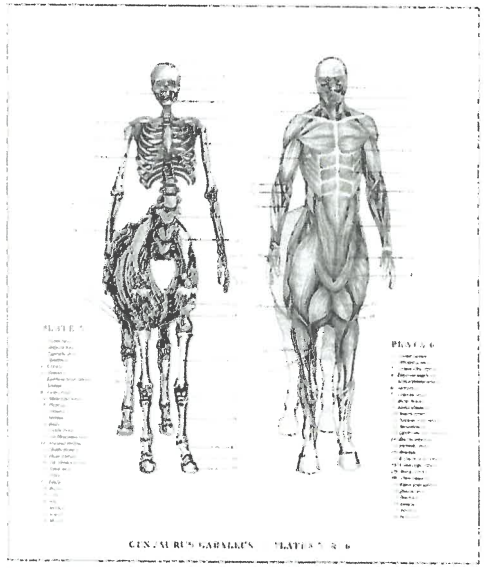
Especially scarce in study material, he lets us know, is the Cretan variation of the Centaur body: one with human forefeet instead of equine ones.
The results of his research he wrote down in a learned article that can be found here: http://www.improbable.com/airchives/paperair/volume12/v12i5/centaur-12-5.pdf , as a product of Improbable Research, a very noteworthy, and even Fortean organisation with a magazine and an annual ***Ig-Nobel Prize*** for the most crazy, but real, scientific research . More here: http://www.improbable.com/
Fantastic, really.Studying the Centaur was done before, when the *Centaur of Volos* was 'unearthed' around 1980. It was on display in museums in Ohio, Wisconsin and Massachusetts. Some work was done on the coloring of the bones of a pony and a human with tea, to make them look equally old. In 1994 the Centaur in its faux marble showcase was permanently enshrined in the library of the University of Knoxville, Tennessee, with the objective to show public and



students that not everything that looks real is real. Adrienne Mayor writes more about this in her interesting book *'The First Fossil Hunters'* (2000)
" A bronze arrowhead is lodged in the human rib cage. The label states that the specimen is one of three Centaur burials dated to about 1300 BCE, discovered in 1980 by Greek archeologists at a site a few miles northeast of Volos, Thessaly. The curator explains how Centaurs once roamed the forests of Thessaly until the appearance of humans, when they fled into more remote areas and gradually died out. While Centaurs are considered by some scholars to be mythological, the discovery at Volos forces us to reconsider this assumption."
The man behind this Centaur was *William Willers*, a zoology

professor and an artist. He wasn't just a clever hoaxer, explains Mayor, he tried to make the whole set-up in a way that a proces of 'fleshing-out' the remains occurs in the viewer, visualising the creature as it could have been when alive, *"allowing us to gain some insight into the psychology of the ancients."*

About the same objective was served by the *Centaur of Timfi*, which is on display at the Barnum Museum in Connecticut, as a gift from the University of Wisconsin.
It came with this information: *"The Centaur of Tymfi is the best-preserved specimen of record due to preservation within a cool, dry cave at 1,900 meters elevation in the Tymfi Mountains of northwestern Greece. There were no other objects in the cave to indicate details of the creature's history."*
There was some discussion over a worthy name for the beast, which would be *'Equine Humanus'* or *'Humanus Equine'*. Not much difference, I think.
The Centaur of Timfi - what a wonderful complete skeleton! - was exhibited in an upright position, behind glass, on April 1, 2014..
Who would doubt its existence? There's more physical evidence for Centaurs than there is for the Dodo!
Here's a short article and a HD video from the opening.
http://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Humbug-or-science-You-be-the-judge-5368558.phpBut where, I ask you, would we be without the work of Dr Spencer Black (1851-?) ? His patient and visionary assembling of mythical creatures - whom he thought were not mythical at all, but just extinct - supplies us with a wonderful anatomical reconstruction of their strange bodies. The good doctor did many a misdeed to follow his dreams, and maybe it is just as well that he disappeared from the face of the earth in 1908, just after the publication of his *Codex of Extinct Animals*, of which only 6 copies were printed. The one still existing copy is found in the Philadelphia Museum of Medical Antiquities.
Where doctor Black went is unknown.
The same is true for most of his specimens. It's likely they were destroyed.
His work though lives on in *'the Resurrectionist'* (Philadelphia 2013), his anatomical creations brought back to us by E.B. Hudspeth, **Centaurus Caballus** being one of them

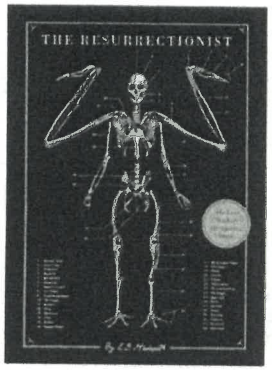


In 7 detailed plates the Centaur is presented in all its glory: bones, muscles, tendons, from every site of the man-animal. With, of course, all the Latin names of its anatomy. So very helpful.
And what's more: Dr Black tells us that there have been evolutionary descendents of the Centaur: the *Centaurus Ipotane* (humans with horsefeet) , the *Pterocentaur* (winged Centaur) , the *Onocentaur* (half man half bull or ass) and possibly others. It's likely, says the good doctor, that in some obscure village east of Sofia in Bulgaria there's more evidence for the existence of the Great Centaur.
Here, obviously, lies a challenge for cryptozoologists of today.

The classical authors have been discussing and philosophying about

the reality of mixed races a lot, and that discussion has continued for many centuries after they closed their eyes. Thanks to the human love for the unbelievable we have fantastic art, great stories of discovery and lots of beautiful Bestiaries telling us about the biologically impossible.

Stephen T. Asma writes in his book *'On Monsters'* (2009) about Lucretius (first Century BCE) who in his book *'On the Nature of Things'* (De Rerum Natura) *"offers mondane proof against monstrous ancestors: monsters would have needed the exact matching sexual organs in order to procreate, and that fit seems even harder to believe if chance is the only cause. In the same passage, he offers an interesting argument for why centaurs could not exist. Lucretius points out that humans mature at a much slower rate than horses do. Consequently, the half-man half-horse would be ridiculous. Lucretius uses this logic to eliminate the possibility of any hybrid monsters that are similarly discordant in terms of their developmental trajectories. "*



But this logic doesn't apply when the Centaur is a welldefined species and not a hybrid.
This only illustrates how mythological creatures kept philosophers and explorers of nature busy.
Obviously the subject was important enough to engage the great minds of the classical period.
A nice example is a story from Plutarch's *"The Feast of the Seven Sages"*, which is also found in Mayor's book. While the learned men are discussing the Centaur and Plutarch wonders how they would react on seeing a live one, the host, Periander of Corinth, comes in with the news that a mare in his stable has just given birth to a Centaur child. The half-human foal cries like a human baby.
Turns out the philosophers have nothing to say. One turnes away, whispering 'God save us'. Another wonders about the symbolic meaning of the creature. A third makes a joke about the stableboy romancing the mare. Like a modern Fortean, Plutarch ridicules the attitude of people who rather don't burn their fingers on a real event, and favor the 'explain away' mode for anomalous phenomena.
Assembling mythical creatures from other animals' body parts was not unheard of in classical times.
The FeeJee Mermaid stands in a long tradition of fakes looking real (or sort of) .
I return to Adrienne Mayor in *'The First Fossil Hunters'* . She writes: *"The ancient and modern faux Centaurs demonstrate how complex hoaxes can transcend mere trickery or entertainment: they mark the intersection of imagination and the unknown. A better term for such hoaxing projects is 'paleontological fictions' , a phrase that captures the positive, creative, even nostalgic aspects of such improvised evidence. Indeed, every reconstruction of an extinct life-form - whether a scientific artist's drawing, a full scale museum replica or a computer animated dinosaur in a Hollywood movie - is a form of paleontological fiction."* (a phrase coined by Beauvais Lyons, a French artist specialised in creating them, just like William Willers does).
"Such fictions were created for the theater, and the public loved it, willingly suspending disbelief in order to enhance our imaginative powers and to contemplate nature's hidden history", writes Diodorus of Sicily, a Greek historian of the first century BCE. And Mayor agrees: *"Just as Willers' modern Centaur project breaks down the distinction between credulity and scepticism, certain ancient writers*

such as Diodorus, Pausanias, Philostratus, Plutarch and Aelian seemed to intuit that challenging the imagination might be the key to coming to terms with the unknowable."
Isn't that what the Fortean branch of cryptozoology is all about?

What I really wanted to write about when I started this article is a live Centaur that made its appearance in a holy story from the 4th century CE. But then all those other Centaurs jumped in, and I was distracted.

There was once a saint, named Anthony, in history known by multiple names for the same man.
We could add 'Anthony of the Centaur'.
This Anthony lived from 251-356, so he was pretty old when he died. (Don't confuse him with another holy man, Anthony of Padua who lived almost a 1000 years later).
Most of us know Anthony best because of the very imaginative painting of Michelangelo (after an engraving by Martin Schongauer), *'The Torment of St Anthony'* , where we see multiple unsavory characters lifting the poor greybeard in the air. They didn't drop him though, or otherwise he would never have met his Centaur.St Anthony was a hermit, and living alone in the wilderness with only animals for company can lead to 'temptations' as well as visions and dreams. These were gratefully depicted by many famous and less famous painters, old and modern, from voluptuous women to devils and strange creatures, to even the roots of plants taking on a less than innocent appearance. It's interesting to google this menagerie..
It must have been hard for the holy man to withstand a procession of evil beings, all together more plentiful than all sightings of Mothman and Owlman and shapeshifting werewolves we have today.

As if that wasn't enough.another monster was on its way to confuse the poor hermit. Or so it seemed.
We find this story in the *'Life of Paul'* , chapter 7 & 8 , written down around the year 374 CE by St Hieronimus, the Churchfather.At that point Anthonius is already 90, and convinced, after all those years of loneliness in the desert, that he's the only hermit on earth. Secretly he is kind of proud of himself that he managed to survive all those years on his own. But then, writes Hieronimus, *"in the stillness of the night it was reveiled to him that there was farther in the desert a much better man than he, and that he ought to go and visit him."*

Anthonius doesn't hesitate and in the morning he starts out, but he doesn't know where to find this other hermit. Which is quite a problem, when you are not as agile as you used to be.
We see him thinking, leaning heavily on his staff. Waiting for a sign. Praying.
Then: *"all at once he beholds a creature of mingled shape, half horse half man, called by the poets Hippocentaur. "*
That's quite a shock for the old man, and not at all what he expected. The Centaur must have been an impressive sight.
Anthony crosses himself and, manning up, exclaims: *"Hallo! Where in these parts is a servant of God living?"*
Says Hieronimous: "The monster after gnashing out some kind of outlandish utterance, in words broken rather than spoken through his bristling lips, at length finds a friendly mode of communication, and extending his right hand points out the way desired."
He then gallops away, leaving Anthony to ponder if he has just seen the devil in one of his many guises, or a beast that was what it seemed to be: a Centaur. The Centaur in his turn must have been equally surprised at the sight of a human being where he didn't expect to see one. His communication skills were rusty. Harry Potter's Centaur was a bit more vocal. Do Centaurs whinny, I wonder?But the story is not yet finished.
For after the Centaur took off Anthony continues his walk in the direction that was pointed out to him, and at a certain moment he enters a rocky valley that is shut in on all sides.
There he meets a *" Mannikin with hooked snout, horned forehead, and extremities like goats' feet."*
Anthony only thinks that there's another one coming to make his life miserable. So he *"seizes the shield of faith and the helmet of hope"*
None of this is necessary, for *"the creature began to offer him fruit of the palm-trees to support him on his journey and as it were pledges of peace."*Never trust a first impression, Anthony probably thought. He asks the creature who he is, and receives a clear answer: in front of him stands a Faun, also named Satyr or Incubus, a representative of his tribe. But much more surprising than his eloquent speech is the fact that this Faun is educated in Christian doctrine.
Anthony is moved, tears streaming down his aged cheeks, and he praises God that creatures like these know of Christ and ask for his prayers.
The Faun meanwhile, maybe startled by the hermit's emotional

outburst, takes of.
Other versions tell that he asked for the hermit's blessing.

Anthony and Paul meet in the end, but that story is of lesser importance her.
The meeting with the Centaur is depicted several times, here, by 'the *Master of the Osservanza'*, mid 15th century, in a kind of sequence: Anthony on his way, than meeting the Centaur, and at last the warm embrace with St Paul. The faun is not in the picture,
probably because his looks are less clearly described in the story.
Hieronimus adds something which is of importance.
He writes:

"In case anyone has scruples about believing this (story), it was proved to be true by what happened when Constantius was emperor, witnessed by the whole world. For a man of this kind was brought to Alexandria alive, providing the people with a marvelous spectacle. Later, when it was a lifeless corpse, salt was sprinkled on it to prevent the summer heat causing it to putrefy, and it was carried to Antioch for the emperor to see it."

Says Pliny (First century CE) in his *Natural History*,

Damned Transatlantic Vagrant Birds

Richard George

I've managed to dig up, out of a musty drawer, a book originally published in the 1860s called *British Birds In Their Haunts,* by the Reverend C.A Johns. My Welsh grandfather, John "Jack" Pritchard, won it as a school prize in 1912, when he was sixteen, and gave it to me in 1972, when I was six. (I was a horribly precocious birdwatcher).

Reading it again brought back warm memories of my Welsh grandparents, Nain and Taid, and their fascinating house in Claughton, Birkenhead. What I've always remembered about the book was a sensational and unmistakable American raptor, the Swallow-Tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). When I bought my first copy of Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow's *Collins Guide* later in 1972, I was surprised that this bird was nowhere mentioned. I'd never heard the word "Fortean" back then, obviously, but this introduced me to the idea that there were unofficial, marginal British bird sightings.

Here, with his rather splendid Victorian prose style, is Johns on the Swallow-Tailed Kite:

"Up to the year 1853, two specimens only of this fine bird had been observed in England. In the April of that year one was observed in Eskdale, Cumberland, in company with Peregrine Falcons. A fortnight afterwards, its roosting place was discovered by a bird collector, who made several ineffectual attempts to shoot it; he then fixed his gun into a wall, and thus covered the eyrie situated in the crevice of a crag; returning at midnight, he discharged his gun, and on the following morning found that his shot had told; the visitor, too wary to be surprised by open skill, fell a victim to treachery, and all chance of its meeting with a mate, and breeding in this country, was lost… (p.33).

But here is Morris's British Birds of 1891 (1):

"Three specimens only have as yet occurred in this country, driven over probably by tempestuous winds. One of them was killed in the year 1772, at Balachoalist, in Argyllshire, and the other was captured in Wensleydale

in Yorkshire, at Shaw-gill, near Hawes, on the 6th of September 1805. The "pitiless pelting" of a tremendous storm, and the simultaneous buffetings of a flock of Rooks, drove it to take shelter in a thicket, in which it was caught before it was able to escape. It was kept by the person who captured it for a month, but it then made its escape through a door that had been accidentally left open… These facts are recorded in the 14th Volume of the Linnaean Transactions, in a letter from W. Fothergill Esq.,of Carr End, near Askrigg…

Two others since the above was written, are stated to have occurred, namely, one near Burlington, and one near Helmsley Blackmoor in 1851, by a gamekeeper of Lord Feversham..."

Arithmetic appears to have been buffeted by tempestuous winds here. Four, plus the Eskdale one – is that five ?

What are we to make of all this ? Are all the above sightings invalid, and if so why ? North American raptors very rarely cross the Atlantic, but the American Kestrel (*falco sparverius*) and the Northern Harrier (*circus hudsonius*) are both on the British List as accidentals. So it is possible. Kites, being scavengers, rather than true hunters, are little used in falconry. But could these Swallow-Tailed Kites have been escapes from collections ? There is also an enigmatic reference in Johns's Preface about certain sightings being suspicious because of "the very high price now given for rarities".

Incidentally, the Swallow-Tailed Kite was recently officially recorded on European territory – in the Canary Islands ! (2)

Johns's Preface also contains a list of provisional sightings from the early 1860s. One of these is described as *strix asio,* Mottled Owl – presumably the North American Eastern Screech Owl, *megascops asio*. This is perplexing, as smaller owls are not great vagrants. This bird was supposedly seen in Yorkshire. An escape from a collection ? Or a misidentified Scops Owl ?

In the same list are two American woodpeckers, the Downy Woodpecker, *dryobates pubescens*, and the Hairy Woodpecker, *leuconotopicus villosus*, from Dorset and Yorkshire respectively. "Hairy" is right for these sightings (as in "shaggy dog"). With the exception of the Black Woodpecker, subject of a piece I wrote for the 2020 CFZ Yearbook, woodpeckers are not strong long-distance flyers and rarely vagrate. Woodpeckers are also uncommonly kept in captivity. It is tempting to dismiss these as misidentifications of our native Spotted Woodpeckers.

Johns writes beautifully, but he can be annoyingly vague. On the Black Woodpecker (or, as he refers to it, the Great Woodpecker), he has this to say:

"Of this bird a few specimens only have been observed in England..." (p.295).

And here he is on the Brown Noddy, *anous stolidus* (3), not on the British List, which he calls the Noddy Tern:

"It has little claim to be classed among British birds, inasmuch as a few specimens only have been observed in St. George's Channel, and two have been shot off the coast of Wexford... (p.574).

Before I go, I can't resist a couple more of his quotes. This description of the Eagle Owl is almost Owlman- and Jersey Devil-esque !

"When wounded and attacked by dogs, it turns itself on its back, extends its open talons, and executes a movement with its beak which serves to guard the whole body. These strange manoeuvres, accompanied as they are by rolling of the eyes, and a hissing noise like the exaggerated purr of a cat, are so alarming, that the most courageous dog hesitates before making his first onset, and rarely attempts a second. The note of the Eagle Owl is described as being most discordant and hideous; by some being compared to the bark of a dog, by others to the neigh of a horse, and by others again to an agonized human shriek..." (p.45).

Then there is the Great Auk. In the 1860s it was in the kind of limbo the Eskimo Curlew is in now. As a child I found the following, in the Present Tense, very haunting:

"The Great Auk is a bird of such rare occurrence that history is attached to every specimen that has been observed by persons competent to write a detailed account of what they have seen; and the occurrence of a genuine egg... being offered for sale is an incident of some importance..." (p.552).

I still do.

REFERENCES

(1) birdcheck.co.uk/main/previewpages/previewpage336.htm

(2) en.wikipedia,org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_Spain;

birdguides.com/reviews/books/rare-birds-of-the-canary-islands

(3) *Anous*, by the way, is not what Borat calls the fundament, but is from the Greek meaning "mindless", with reference to the bird's alleged stupidity.

LETTERS & E-MAILS

Black rabbits of Scotland`s "Anthrax island"

Richard George

I have two peculiar quotations in my locker about Gruinard in the north-west of Scotland, "Anthrax Island". The first is from Robert Harris and Jeremy Paxman's study *A Higher Form of Killing: The Secret Story of Gas and Germ Warfare* (1982). This is a younger, fresher-faced version of Paxo the inquisitor of *Newsnight* and *University Challenge*. On Gruinard, according to this pair:

Rabbits are said to have turned black as genetic changes have rendered them immune to the anthrax spores, now estimated to be buried nearly a foot underground... (p.73).

I suspect this is absolute nonsense zoologically and a myth. Melanistic rabbits are found on the Shetland Islands and Skomer, which have never been the site of anthrax experiments. I've read somewhere that black rabbits are more frequent in locations, such as islands, where there are fewer ground predators. "Anthrax" derives from the Greek for "charcoal" and causes, in its cutaneous form, black skin lesions: this may be where Harris and Paxman's misunderstanding, if this is what it is, comes from.There is an interesting folkloric tie-in here, though. According to one story about the legendary Irish island Hy-Brasil, it is inhabited by unusually large black rabbits.

The other Gruinard quote comes from Richard Gordon's 1983 humorous volume *Great Medical Disasters.*

On short summer nights when the breeze comes lightly from the northwest, they say you can hear the plaintive, baaing, coughing of

anthrax-infected sheep... (p.140).

I can't find any confirmation for this in local ghost lore. It may just be a literary conceit on Gordon's part. His book is a very good read, I must say.

I actually find this whole broth of sinister black rabbits and ghostly sheep irresistibly Craggy Island and *Father Ted.* Remember Bishop Brennan's phobia of rabbits, and the belching prize sheep in Series Three that had to, in the words of that annoying advert, "Search for the hero inside itself" ? And since when has buying a duff French car helped you find the hero inside yourself ? Ah, the Nineties...

Two Unpublished Letters of Mine to *Fortean Times*

Richard George

I first had a letter published in *Fortean Times* in 1998. I was still in group therapy in the Tavistock Clinic in London at the time (and attending Unconventions). I'd seen on a lamp post in St.Albans, where I live, a poignantly home-made sign reading OWL MAN DANNY DIES AGED 34.

This wasn't a zooform entity, of course, but a homeless man who owned a pet Tawny Owl. Even so, I thought it might tickle readers of *FT*, in particular the author of *The Owlman and Others.* Danny died, incidentally, following a scuffle in which he tried to stop an inebriate passer-by kicking his dog, Charlie.

Since then, the *Fortean Times* Letters Page has been very good to me. Inevitably, though, some communications of mine don't make

it to publication. One such concerned the small entity found in a mine in the Forest of Dean in 1924, which you wrote about in the second ever *Flying Snake*. Theo Paijmans returned to this case in *Fortean Times* in February this year (2020).

I had my sensible sceptic's hat on when I wrote this…

A possible, if rather mundane, explanation for the Forest of Dean manikin (FT 389.30f.) is that it was an organ grinder's escaped monkey, which had just sought refuge in the mine. Mrs Gwilliam's statement that the creature looked like a little collier is intriguing, as capuchins, the type of monkey most commonly employed by organ grinders, have what looks like a cowl on their head (hence their name), which could be mistaken for a miner's cap. Sometimes, indeed, the animals were attired in little uniforms, including headgear.

Another correspondence of mine that didn't make it was about skeletons found in trees, a subject you and Loes Modderman wrote about in *Flying Snake* 12 in 2017. *FT* had done a front-pager on the "Bella in the Wych Elm" case in March 2018.

In this letter I drew parallels with the situation at Clophill. Briefly, as this is serious occult territory, a derelict church on a hill in this village in Bedfordshire has for the past half century been an infamous centre for Satanic worship. The shenanigans began in 1963, when boys out on a cycle ride from Luton stumbled across the remnants of a deeply disturbing ritual. I think that's enough context. Here's what I wrote:

The Bella Wych Elm case (FT 364.34-41) has intriguing parallels with the Clophill incident of 1963: in both cases boys out on a jaunt made a macabre discovery involving a woman's bones. And what is the etymology of "Clophill" ? "Tree-stump hill"... Also, there is a piece on human skeletons in trees in the September 2017 edition of Richard Muirhead's excellent periodical Flying Snake. Near

Clermont, Queensland in 1927, the bodies of a Native Australian man and woman, apparently victims of murder, were found in a hollow tree. A local police officer, Inspector O'Connor, commented that tree burial was "quite a common thing among natives".

But there's more to all this.

Last year I read Jonathan Downes's hilarious and touching autobiography *Monster Hunter*. In 1995 Jonathan revisited a church on a hill above the West Country town of Buckfastleigh, and the grave of legendarily evil 17th century local squire Richard Cable, possible original for Hugo Baskerville… Over to the Owlman man…

Events had taken a sinister turn in the early nineties, when both the church and Cable's tomb itself were attacked by Satanists (or a local nutter – depending on which version of events you choose to believe). The church is now a burned out shell... The vandals attempted to take the slab off the sarcophagus itself...

The zeitgeist of the place had changed dramatically. Not only was the church itself gutted by fire; there was occult graffiti everywhere and a makeshift altar splattered with pentagrams drawn in red paint had been erected where the church organ used to be. It broke my heart... (p.53f.)

The ruined church on a hill, the desecrations, the graffiti… straight outta Clophill. The original Clophill ghouls of 1963 had opened the altar tomb of a young woman called Jenny Humberstone, wife of an apothecary, and violated her bones in a fashion suggestive of necromancy. She died in 1770. I find it hard not to see this in psycho-sexual terms, as a particularly horrible form of rape.

Here's the really eerie thing, though. Only a few months after Jonathan's visit, a Dorset stable girl was found battered to death. Her

name ? Jessie Hurlstone. According to Jonathan

Some local occultists are convinced that there is a definite link between the murder... and the desecration of the church and Cable's tomb.

Lexi-links don't always convince me, but the similarity between the two woman's names is disconcerting. And there's more about this surname "Humberstone". It has historical links with the village of Walkern in north Hertfordshire, where noted witch Jane Wenham lived. This may have been one of the reasons the weirdos at Clophill chose Jenny to exhume. And, remarkably, there is a haunted deserted mining town in Chile called... Humberstone !

In another letter to *FT*, this time published ("Eerie parallels", 383.94), I pointed out similarities in the narratives involving Clophill, the Meon Hill murder of 1945, and a cult of Hecate in Sussex investigated by Charles Walker and Toyne Newton. Staring maniacally from the cover of this edition... Charles Manson. Documented in its Necrolog... David Farrant, he of Highgate Cemetery:

Increasingly sensational stories followed... leading the crumbling cemetery to become a magnet for thrill seekers, occult dabblers and cross-and-fang

fanatics of all varieties. With them came a wave of desecration and vandalism to graves...

Is a very gruesome and disturbing event repeating itself in slightly differing forms ? Is Sheldrake's "morphic resonance" involved ?

If you're out there, and your name's Julie Heatherstone, don't have nightmares.

That strange "stegosaurus" ornament

Dear Dr. Devo,

Further to our recent very brief correspondence concerning what I will now admit to thinking is a hideous ornament, pictured on the front cover of Flying Snake number 16; you do seem to have worked out what was going through my mind. I think the price tag is a bit much for me at £95, even assuming it's still for sale (would anyone else actually want it?), but you are right; I was wondering if I might purchase the ornament (purely for the furtherance of science, of course).

I speculated whether the creature depicted near the base of the ornament might be a stegosaurus or a lobster, but you tell me that you always thought it was a dragon or crocodile. Erm: my enthusiasm for purchasing the ornament has depreciated (not that I would have wanted it were the animal a lobster, either).

Speaking entirely from memory; there is the clear representation of a stegosaurus on the architrave of a temple in Cambodia, another depicted on a column of a Jewish synagogue somewhere: there are two steggos in that carving actually; one showing the complete animal and the other a head only; biting a horse; presumably to show the size.

What is the ornament anyway? Does it depict some kind of a shrine? I notice the frieze along the bottom which seems to represent the pointed plates on the back of a steggo. Then behind the animal itself, there is an arc composed of similar plates. Could the ornament be a model of a shrine dedicated to this rare beast?

name ? Jessie Hurlstone. According to Jonathan

Some local occultists are convinced that there is a definite link between the murder... and the desecration of the church and Cable's tomb.

Lexi-links don't always convince me, but the similarity between the two woman's names is disconcerting. And there's more about this surname "Humberstone". It has historical links with the village of Walkern in north Hertfordshire, where noted witch Jane Wenham lived. This may have been one of the reasons the weirdos at Clophill chose Jenny to exhume. And, remarkably, there is a haunted deserted mining town in Chile called... Humberstone !

In another letter to *FT*, this time published ("Eerie parallels", 383.94), I pointed out similarities in the narratives involving Clophill, the Meon Hill murder of 1945, and a cult of Hecate in Sussex investigated by Charles Walker and Toyne Newton. Staring maniacally from the cover of this edition... Charles Manson. Documented in its Necrolog... David Farrant, he of Highgate Cemetery:

Increasingly sensational stories followed... leading the crumbling cemetery to become a magnet for thrill seekers, occult dabblers and cross-and-fang

fanatics of all varieties. With them came a wave of desecration and vandalism to graves...

Is a very gruesome and disturbing event repeating itself in slightly differing forms ? Is Sheldrake's "morphic resonance" involved ?

If you're out there, and your name's Julie Heatherstone, don't have nightmares.

That strange "stegosaurus" ornament

Dear Dr. Devo,

Further to our recent very brief correspondence concerning what I will now admit to thinking is a hideous ornament, pictured on the front cover of Flying Snake number 16; you do seem to have worked out what was going through my mind. I think the price tag is a bit much for me at £95, even assuming it's still for sale (would anyone else actually want it?), but you are right; I was wondering if I might purchase the ornament (purely for the furtherance of science, of course).

I speculated whether the creature depicted near the base of the ornament might be a stegosaurus or a lobster, but you tell me that you always thought it was a dragon or crocodile. Erm; my enthusiasm for purchasing the ornament has depreciated (not that I would have wanted it were the animal a lobster, either).

Speaking entirely from memory; there is the clear representation of a stegosaurus on the architrave of a temple in Cambodia, another depicted on a column of a Jewish synagogue somewhere: there are two steggos in that carving actually; one showing the complete animal and the other a head only: biting a horse; presumably to show the size.

What is the ornament anyway? Does it depict some kind of a shrine? I notice the frieze along the bottom which seems to represent the pointed plates on the back of a steggo. Then behind the animal itself, there is an arc composed of similar plates. Could the ornament be a model of a shrine dedicated to this rare beast?

A steggo on a temple in Cambodia, another on the column of a synagogue, and now a third, on a shrine! Was there once a cult of the stegosaurus? Or perhaps only monks or priests had the time and motivation to record the presence of the last few of these creatures!

So, what is the animal in question? Does the ornament depict a creature thought to have become extinct millions of years ago?

Yours eagerly awaiting an opinion.

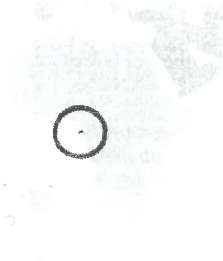
Richard Colborne

NOTES & QUERIES

The Metallica Snake

The Times September 2nd 2020

" Confronted with a mysterious "dragon-like" snake lurking at the base of a west African volcano, scientists immediately agreed on whom it brought to mind James Hetfield, the Metallica vocalist. Accordingly, the 52cm viper, characterised by "a triangular shaped head and strongly keeled scales," whose bite can be fatal, has been named *Atheris hetfieldi.* It is the first species of snake to be discovered on Bioko Island, 20 miles off Equatorial Guinea, for more than a century…"



Map of Equatorial Guinea. Wikipedia Commons

Genets in the UK

On "Strange animal in Devon, 1870" (Notes and Queries, FS 17): there is a definite genet sighting online from January 2017. It was found curled up in a tyre in a car depot in Milton Keynes. Its owner, Kyle Watson, travelled from Brighton to collect it: its name was Kamarla. It may have found its way into a depot truck and accidentally stowed away.

See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks

-herts-38594655;

miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/rare-spotted-genet-found-

milton-keynes-warehouse-1164059

Escaped or released genets are believed to have formed small

populations in Germany, Holland and Switzerland (P. Gaubert, F. Jiguet, P. Bayle, F.M. Angelici,

"Has the common genet (*genetta genetta) spread into south-eastern France and Italy ?", Italian Journal of Zoology 75(1): p.43 (2008)). Could this happen in Britain ?*

Richard George

Singing dog of New Guinea re-discovered

The Times September 2nd 2020

" A rare ancient dog with a talent for harmonic choral yodelling has been found in the New Guinea jungle. Scientists used DNA to confirm the existence of the New Guinea Singing Dog ,in Papua,east Indonesia. It was previously known only from a few hundred inbred specimens in zoos. The New Guinea Highland Wild Dog Foundation said the animal...was "one of the most ancient canids, potentially our best example of a proto-canid and truly, a living fossil…"

Post arrives after 100 years

The Times

September 15th 2020

" The card arrived in the postbox of an old white house in Belding,Michigan,this month.The home`s owner,Brittany Keech,noted the green stamp,which had been bought for one cent.It was addressed to a Roy McQueen and came from Flossie Burgess,who reported that "we are all quite well but mother has awful lame knees".She wanted to know if Roy had "got his pants fixed yet?" The postmark said October 29,1920..."

New species of Owl

https://www.looptt.com/content/nature-group-finds-owl-species-new-trinidad?fbclid=IwAR36cHTQHoTsNGFXUpNFCFYz-3IcdHXs-GND3QZ25Fozwdp8zPha1Hz9LCg

Conservationists find new owl species in Trinidad

August 14th 2020

"A search for various snake species at the Caroni Wildlife Sanctuary turned out to be something entirely different for two conservationists.

Wildlife rehabilitator and conservationist with the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation, Hukaymah Ali, told Loop News that the discovery took place in 2018 while she was exploring the Caroni Wildlife Sanctuary with fellow conservationist and photographer, Rainer Deo.

She and her colleagues formed a group called West Indian Herping to educate people about snakes (herpetology is the study of reptiles and amphibians).

She said they were out at night when they received a shock.

'It was a typical night, we went to the Caroni Bird Sanctuary and were just looking to see what types of snakes we could find.'

'We looked up and saw this huge owl; and we were like, what is that?'

She said Deo managed to pull out his camera and quickly snapped a photo before the owl flew away…"

Elephant Shrew Rediscovered in Djibouti

The Times August 19th 2020

Lost Shrew is tamed using peanut butter

" A mammal thought to have been extinct for more than half a century has been rediscovered in Africa...The Somali elephant shrew had not been seen since 1968 but researchers have released pictures and video taken in Djibouti last year of the insect-eating and, apparently, peanut butter-loving animal. It is about the size of a mouse and its tiny legs can power it to 20 mph…"

Somali sengi (*Galegeeska revoili,* syn,*Elephantulus revoili* photograph at the Assamo locality in Djibouti Wikipedia Commons

Albino Hedgehog in Yorkshire

BBC News web site August 23rd 2020

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-53880061?SThisFB&fbclid=IwAR0rBmg-0tYeeYfH1cbESTlFKHKggzGeBoxOOwplqdMy_hCsFmc7rUOaB-s

"A six-year-old boy came to the rescue of a rare albino hedgehog which was near death when he spotted it in the middle of the road.

Ruben Wiggins realised the unusual hedgehog should not be out during the daytime and needed help.

His mother helped coax out the little creature, which had hidden under a car in Otley, West Yorkshire.

The animal, since named Jack Frost, was taken to Prickly Pigs Hedgehog Rescue and found to be "at death's door".

Diane Cook, who runs the organisation, said: "When we received the message through our Facebook page we were initially puzzled by the description and thought it was perhaps a pet African Pigmy Hedgehog that had escaped someone's home.
"When Ruben arrived with his father, we were taken back by this tiny white spiky ball with a pink nose and eyes, a true albino hedgehog...."

Weird White Welsh Spider

The partner of a relative told me in early November of a white spider (with an unpronounceable name) which lives underground in Wales.

Monster crocodile is caught in nature park

The Times September 1st 2020

Wildlife rangers trapped a 4.4 meter (14ft 5 in) saltwater crocodile at a tourist destination in Australia`s Northern Territory, the biggest caught in the area in years. The 350 kg (770 lb) male was in the Flora River Nature Park. John Burke, a senior wildlife ranger at the town of Katherine,said. A crocodile measuring 4.7 meters was caught close to the sea two years ago. (AP)

Crocodile spotted on bank of German river

The Times September 8th 2020

A river has been closed to the public after two sightings of a crocodile said to be 2m long. Eighty fire fighters and police spent a day combing the banks of the Unstrut, 40 miles west of Leipzig, after the reptile was spotted at locations 15 miles apart. They found what appeared to be a crocodile`s tracks. It is unclear whether it escaped from a zoo or a private collection. The crocodile was first seen by anglers near Laucha, a town in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt,last week. On Sunday, a horse rider saw the crocodile lying on the bank with its mouth open a few miles from Schönewerda across the border in Thuringia.

More on that German Crocodile

The Times September 15th 2020

"Authorities in Germany trying to find a crocodile spotted several times in a river have used a dead chicken hanging above the water as bait to lure it in front of a wildlife camera. The chicken was suspended over the River Unstrut after dozens of police officers using a helicopter and drones failed to locate the crocodile…"

Whales go up Australian River

BBC News web site September 14th 2020

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-54142985

Humpback whales enter crocodile river `in Australian first.`

"Australian officials say they will try to guide a humpback whale out of a crocodile-infested river in the Northern Territory after it got lost and ended up 30km (18.5 miles) inland.

The whale and others were on an annual sea migration when some of them "took a wrong turn", experts believe.Two whales were later able to swim out of the river, but at least one remains.It's the first known instance of a whale being found in crocodile territory so far inland in Australia.Given its estimated 16m (52 ft) length, the humpback is considered unlikely to be disturbed by crocodiles…."

Lions in Worcestershire

I got this e-mail from Carl Marshall on September 27th 2011:"I have a very interesting account of many lions being released at Broadwas Court near Worcester in about 1890.A chap bought them and released them into his garden and apparently there was so many that he could not even venture outside.I would say some would have escaped..."

Weird Jumping Porcupine Thing

I found a fascinating account in the Trenton Evening Times (USA) for September 23rd 1893 of a mystery animal, under the headline The Flying Porcupine, though the word "jumping" might be more appropriate:

"There is a curious Dardistan superstition with regard to an animal called "harginn", which appears to be more like a porcupine than anything else. It is covered with bristles . Its back is of a reddish brown and the other parts of a yellowish color.

The animal is supposed to be very dangerous and to contain poison in its bristles. At the approach of any man or animal it is said to gather itself up for a terrific jump into the air, from which it descends unto the head of the intended victim. It is said to be generally about half a yard long and a span broad. Lal Mohammad, a saintly Akhunzada, but a regular Munchausen, affirmed to have once met with a curious incident with regard to that animal. He was out shooting one day when he saw a stag which seemed intently to look in one direction. He fired off his gun, which,however, did not divert the attention of the stag.

At last he found out what it was that the stag was looking at.It turned out to be a huge "harginn" , which had swallowed a large markhor with the exception of its horns. There was the porcupine, out of whose mouth protruded the head and horns of the markhor. The Ghilgiti, on the contrary, said that the harginn was a great snake, " like a big fish called nang." Perhaps harginn means a monster or dragon and is applied to different animals in the two countries of Ghilghiti and Astor - Dr Leitner in Asiatic Quarterly."

Wikipedia Commons Malayan or Himalayan porcupine.

Mass Bird Die-Offs in South-western USA

The Guardian online September 16th 2020

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/16/birds-falling-out-of-the-sky-in-mass-die-off-in-south-western-us-aoe?fbclid=IwAR3S0bfeTjLv93LeVAQkmOTNFNNAyrwZsOw-DPfTZCvfp3DE5xzW5VrpeRo

"Thousands of migrating birds have inexplicably died in south-western US in what ornithologists have described as a national tragedy that is likely to be related to the climate crisis.

Flycatchers, swallows and warblers are among the species "falling out of the sky" as part of a mass die-off across New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Arizona and farther north into Nebraska, with growing concerns there could be hundreds of thousands dead already, said Martha Desmond, a professor in the biology department at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Many carcasses have little remaining fat reserves or muscle mass, with some appearing to have nose-dived into the ground mid-flight.

"I collected over a dozen in just a two-mile stretch in front of my house," said Desmond. "To see this and to be picking up these carcasses and realising how widespread this is, is personally devastating. To see this many individuals and species dying is a national tragedy...."

Giant Bird in Kent

The Evening Star Washington D.C. November 11th 1938

Attacked by Bird.Attacked by a huge mystery bird,Mrs A.E.Archdale was knocked from her bicycle near Merewaworth Woods,England,and was rescued only after the winged monster had been driven off."I think this actually refers to Mereworth Woods,Kent.

Eagle in Wiltshire in 1996?

I found this note in a folder-Large bird about the size of an eagle,brownish with other markings,ragged wings.At Orcheston ,Wiltshire.June 7th 1996.

Strange behaviour of Orcas

The Times September 24th 2020

"Spain has suspended yachting off its northwest coast after a series of encounters in which orcas have rammed sailing boats in the Atlantic. The week-long ban is in place as scientists try to fathom the killer whales` unusual behaviour...The newly restricted area is rich in tuna which the killer whales follow on their migration route…"

Giant Monitor Lizard in Malawi

A lady in Macclesfield who once lived in Malawi told me about a giant monitor lizard in that country which grew up to about 25ft in length. It was greyish in colour and lived in holes in the ground.

Giant Lizard in the Solomon Islands

Washington Citizen November 17th 1944

"...I sat for long minutes watching a monster swamp lizard as it passed within two or three feet of me and disappeared into the dark mouth of the tunnel-like trail that penetrated the bamboo break a few feet away. Fully the size of an average man, the lizard was the most viscous looking reptile I have ever seen…"

There is a species of monitor lizard in the Solomon Islands called the Rennell Islands Monitor that grows to a length of 150cm which is 4.92 feet. "The size of an average man" is nearly 6 feet. The mangrove monitor also inhabits the Solomon islands.

History of the Coypu in Britain

The following piece of research was done by Bob Skinner in September 2020:

"I have a case of an OOP animal near Beachy Head which had been killed (which turned out to be a Coypu) starting a train of correspondence to Field newspaper, with our favourite naturalist Frank Buckland involved in 1862; a record of Coypus imported to the London Zoo in 1851; adverts selling Coypu in the 1880s, and examples of Jamrach (animal dealer) and others selling them (1880s onwards); and reports of how they were used in sideshows at fairs, shown as purportedly as Giant water or sewer rats etc. Another OOP Coypu in Belfast in 1907, (allegedly escaped from such a show) noted in the Countryside magazine; Also an interesting article from Illustrated London news by Maurice Burton in the 1960s. re the spread of Coypus in the uk etc. Burton kept a couple of Coypus at one stage. Lever speaks of them being imported for the fur trade (nutria) from the 1920s and numerous escapes in subsequent decades."

Below: The Coypu. Wikipedia Commons

For more research by **Bob Skinner** on the coypu in the UK, see the following few pages.

Morning Post - 26 December 1851 Page 2

The following list records most of the additions which have been made to the menagerie, by donation or purchase, since my last report, with the exception of those which have been obtained in consequence of the dispersion of the late president's collection at Knowsley :—

MAMMALIA.—Capuchin monkey, from Demerara; presented by G. Dennis, Esq. Vervet monkey, from South Africa; presented by G. Newdigate, Esq. Pigtailed monkey; presented by R. Mathew, Esq. Spider monkey, from South America; presented by Mr. Robinson. Green monkeys, from South Africa; presented by Mr. Robertson. Natal monkey; presented by W. Stranger, Esq. Pinche marmosets; presented by Mrs. Abbott. TIGERS.—Male and female; presented by H. H. the Guicowar of Baroda. Ocelot, from South America. Long-tailed ocelot, from Demerara; deposited by G. Dennis, Esq. Mongoos, from India; presented by Captain Morris, R.N. Kinkajou; presented by Governor Barkly. Esquimaux dogs; presented by Captain Penny and Captain Ommaney, R.N. Red foxes, from North America; presented by W. Culpepper, Esq. Syrian bear, from the Euphrates; presented by Mr. Alderman Finnis. Four racoons, presented by Governor Barkly, Gen. Clark, Capt. Abbott, and Mr. Swinburn. Wild boar, from Saxe-Coburg; presented by H.S.H. the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Mouflon, from Sardinia; presented by Lord Vernon. Philantomba antelope, from Sierra Leone; presented by Sir W. J. Hooker. Coypu rats, from South America; presented by H. Southern, Esq., H.M. Minister at Rio de la Plata. Musquash, from North America; presented by R. Warrington, Esq. Billardiere Kangaroo, from Australia; presented by — Henderson, Esq.

History of the Coypu in Britain

The following piece of research was done by Bob Skinner in September 2020:

"I have a case of an OOP animal near Beachy Head which had been killed (which turned out to be a Coypu) starting a train of correspondence to Field newspaper, with our favourite naturalist Frank Buckland involved in 1862; a record of Coypus imported to the London Zoo in 1851; adverts selling Coypu in the 1880s, and examples of Jamrach (animal dealer) and others selling them (1880s onwards); and reports of how they were used in sideshows at fairs, shown as purportedly as Giant water or sewer rats etc. Another OOP Coypu in Belfast in 1907, (allegedly escaped from such a show) noted in the Countryside magazine; Also an interesting article from Illustrated London news by Maurice Burton in the 1960s. re the spread of Coypus in the uk etc. Burton kept a couple of Coypus at one stage. Lever speaks of them being imported for the fur trade (nutria) from the 1920s and numerous escapes in subsequent decades."

Below: The Coypu. Wikipedia Commons

For more research by **Bob Skinner** on the coypu in the UK, see the following few pages.

Morning Post - 26 December 1851 Page 2

The following list records most of the additions which have been made to the menagerie, by donation or purchase, since my last report, with the exception of those which have been obtained in consequence of the dispersion of the late president's collection at Knowsley :—

MAMMALIA.—Capuchin monkey, from Demerara; presented by G. Dennis, Esq. Vervet monkey, from South Africa; presented by G. Newdigate, Esq. Pigtailed monkey; presented by R. Mutham, Esq. Spider monkey, from South America; presented by Mr. Robinson. Green monkeys, from South Africa; presented by Mr. Robertson. Natal monkey; presented by W. Stranger, Esq. Pinche marmosets; presented by Mrs. Abbott. TIGERS.—Male and female; presented by H. H. the Gaicowar of Baroda. Ocelot, from South America. Long-tailed ocelot, from Demerara; deposited by G. Dennis, Esq. Mongoos, from India; presented by Captain Morris, R.N. Kinkajou; presented by Governor Barkly. Esquimaux dogs; presented by Captain Penny and Captain Ommaney, R.N. Red foxes, from North America; presented by W. Culpepper, Esq. Syrian bear, from the Euphrates; presented by Mr. Alderman Finnis. Four peacocks; presented by Governor Barkly, Gen. Clark, Capt. Abbott, and Mr. Swinburn. Wild boar, from Saxe-Coburg; presented by H.S.H. the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Mouflon, from Sardinia; presented by Lord Vernon. Phlantomba antelope, from Sierra Leone; presented by Sir W. J. Hooker. Coypu rats, from South America; presented by H. Southern, Esq., H.M. Minister at Rio de la Plata. Musquash, from North America; presented by R. Warrington, Esq. Billardiers Kangaroo, from Australia; presented by — Henderson, Esq.

Field - 25 October 1862 Page 9

ENORMOUS RAT.—Having had occasion in one of my rambles at this charming seaside resort (Eastbourne) to visit a farmhouse between this place and the far-famed Beachy Head, I saw on a wall a great many skins of vermin caught at or near the place; but one particularly attracted my attention, and I asked the owner of the farm (taking, as I do, an interest in natural history) what skin it was. He said it was the skin of a rat which he had captured on Beachy Head, and which he supposed was a foreign rat which had escaped from some vessel and taken refuge at the nearest land. Its dimensions are quite wonderful. From its nose to the tip of its tail it is just upon three feet long; the skin is a darkish brown. Having never seen a rat approaching to these dimensions, I think it worth while to ask you to be good enough to give this a place in your valuable paper, in order that Mr Buckland, or somebody else conversant with the tribes and customs of rats, may state to what tribe this extraordinary rat belongs. It must be remembered that the skin has doubtless, from exposure to the weather, and its having been captured some time ago (that is to say some months) shrunk, and therefore, when caught, it must have been still larger than when I measured it. —CURIOSITY.—[Is the creature really a rat?—ED.]

Field -6 December 1862 Page 7

THE ENORMOUS RAT.—Since sending the skin of the rat to THE FIELD, I have made inquiries about it, and am pleased to say I can satisfy Mr Buckland's curiosity whether it was really seen alive. I have received reliable information of its being seen alive on a ledge of the cliff, two days before it was found. The man who found it had no idea, I think, of stuffing it, but he has, I believe, often skinned animals for that purpose. The rat was dead when found, and the hair was rubbed off very much on one side.—R. WATERS (Motcomb, Eastbourne).—[I am most obliged to Mr Waters for his kind note. I am pleased that the real truth and facts of the case have thus been made out, to, I trust, the satisfaction of all who take interest in the matter.—F. T. BUCKLAND.]

— I have no doubt that the rat referred to by your correspondents was the "Coypu." They may, however, satisfy themselves at once upon the point if they will call upon me, as I can show them some thousands of these skins, which are extensively imported from Buenos Ayres. The fine soft wool which underlies the long hair is used in the manufacture of superior felt hats, under the trade name of "Nutria" wool. A relative of mine had two of these animals alive in this country, some years ago. They fed almost entirely on carrots and other esculent roots, and throve well, with the aid of a little artificial warmth in their cage, and a tank of water outside it for them to bathe in. One of them lived some years; he was a savage fellow, and very ready to use his long rodent teeth when irritated.—HARRY LEE (8, Holland-street, Blackfriars-road, London, S.E.)

The Era - 3 April 1897 Page 25

6 GIANT RATS or Coypus, 50 Rhesus Monkeys, 8 Joss, 1 Dog-face, 2 Hyæpetes from Bhôtan, 5 Andaman Starlings, 1 Black-headed Jay, 6 Blue Jays, 1 Mouse Lemur, 1 Madagascar Boa, 3 Purplish Death Adders, 2 Australian Banded Snakes (Nuchalis), 2 Bufelded Death Adders (Notechis Scutatus), 1 Occipital Elaps, or Bandy Bandy, 1 White Donkey (Stallion), 1 Giant Deer from Alaska, 1 Pair Javan Wild Boars, 1 Milky Eagle Owl from Benin, 1 Rough-legged Buzzard, 1 Female Punjaub Wild Sheep, 1 Pair Aoudads, 1 Llama, 3 Ibex, 2 Red Macaws, 3 Salmon-crested Cockatoos, 1 Pair Uvæan Parrakeets, 2 Pairs Yellow Budgerigars, 6 Cinereous Struthidea, 3 Alpine Choughs, 2 Kees, 100 Pairs Budgerigars, 50 Pairs Love Birds, 50 Grey Parrots, 4 Black Parrots, 1 Bell Bird, 1 White Heron, 12 Demoiselle Cranes, 2 Weka Rails, 2 Night Herons, 10 Pelicans, 1 Female Rusa Deer, 3 Female Sambur Deer, 2 Female Yaks, 1 Pair Pumas, 1 Pair Lions, 1 Bengal Tiger, 1 Leopard, 1 Axis Deer, 2 Small Female Japanese Spaniels, 7 Japanese Peafowl, 3 Specifer Peafowl, 50 Pairs Reeves Pheasants, 18 Pairs Black Swans, 90 Bar-headed Geese, 1 Trumpeter Swan, 1 Red Kangaroo, the largest in the world. ALBERT EDWARD JAMRACH (late Charles Jamrach), 180, St. George's-street East.

Illustrated Police News - 12 October 1907 Page 13

MAN ATTACKED BY A GIANT RAT.

Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser
15 August 1936 Page 5

STRANGE ANIMAL ON WARWICK FARM.

SHOT BY GAMEKEEPER AT OLD PARK.

IDENTIFIED AS A COYPU.

SOUTH AMERICAN ORIGIN: VALUABLE FUR.

Mr. T. Tallis, the gamekeeper on the Warwick Castle Old Park, Wedgnock, estate, and, until recently, of the Castle Park, Warwick, had a most unusual experience on Friday of last week.

Mr. Tallis was told by a Warwick boy of a strange animal in a pit, half-full of water, in a field near Deerpark Farm. He went to the pit with some companions and succeeded in shooting the animal, but he was, at first, completely mystified as to what it was.

It was subsequently discovered that the creature was a Coypu, commonly called a nutria—the skin or fur is actually the nutria, and the animal itself is a Coypu. It is of South American origin, and has hitherto been unknown in this district. Several farmers in various parts of the country have started breeding these animals on account of the value of their skins, but there are no farms of the nature anywhere near Warwick.

Mr. Tallis, on learning that the skin was valuable, decided to skin his specimen.

The animal weighed eight pounds and measured 21 inches from its nose to the tip of its tail. It had webbed hind feet, a tail like that of a rat, and teeth like those of a rabbit.

Mr. Tallis, talking to a *Warwick Advertiser* representative, said that he was first told of the animal by John Rutland, of Paradise-street, Warwick. Rutland went to Deerpark Farm where Mr Tallis lives and told him that he had seen the creature in a pit, half-full of water in one of the fields near the farm. Mr. Tallis Mr. W. Davies, Mr. G. Davies, Mr. H. Lloyd and Mr. P. Tallis then proceeded to the pit with guns.

Mr. Tallis said: "I saw what I thought might be the animal under the roots of a tree in the water, but I was not sure as it was dark. I motioned to Mr. Davies to join me, and as I did so the animal moved. It had gone about two yards before I shot it."

WORTH £8 ALIVE

Mr. Tallis added that he thought that it was a young otter when he saw it in the water, and it was very difficult for him to determine what it was after he had shot it as it was dark. He thought it might have been a musk rat, but it had webbed hind feet. Its front feet were similar to those of a rat.

Its identity was not discovered until Mr. Davies happened to glance at a farming paper in which he saw some photographs of an exactly similar animal.

"Had I known what it was I should not have shot it, but should have tried to catch it alive," said Mr. Tallis. "The animals are worth about £8 when alive."

An article which appeared in the "Farmers' Weekly," which contained the photograph recognised by Mr. Davies, states:—"The animals, fearsome as they look, are harmless enough. Indeed they are extremely shy, but if you can familiarise yourself with them and gain their confidence, they show not the least resentment against those they recognise moving among them.

"Some of them become great pets, will 'beg' for food, and even submit to being stroked and patted. They are wholly vegetarian, will not interfere with any other livestock on a farm, and they are not interested in fish or meat.

"The nutria is hardy enough and apparently is not affected by our climatic conditions. They revel in the cold and enjoy the sun. No disease exists among them; they do not foul land, which remains clean under them indefinitely, providing they have access to running water."

A point of interest here is that the animal shot by Mr. Tallis was found at least three-quarters of a mile from the nearest running water, and, so far, no theories have been advanced as to how it got there. Mr. Tallis himself can offer no explanation.

Mr. Tallis told our representative that he had never seen an animal anything like the Coypu before. It is very doubtful if it would have been recognised if it had not been for Mr. Davies noticing the photograph.

The Coypu is of the beaver family and is the same colour as a beaver. It is an expert swimmer.

Articles in Fate magazine

Appear courtesy of Gary Mangiacopra

Thank you to Gary for providing me with the following articles:

MANNA FROM THE SKY

FATE Vol 8 Number 8, Issue Number 65, August 1955

Mrs C.H.Holden, Groton, Connecticut

"I wonder if any of the readers of FATE ever have seen or heard about manna falling from the sky (or wherever it does come from).I recall that when I was a small child my father showed me a white substance on the grass and told me that it was very unusual. He made an effort to impress it on my memory. I lived in Providence,Rhode Island,then and it was about 1903. He related how the children of Israel were fed by manna while in the wilderness.

Although I was very young I have a distinct recollection of a white substance on the grass. I wonder if anyone has witnessed such a phenomenon.

I also recall a rain of small frogs or toads and small fishes while a child in Providence. Later ,about 1930 in Groton, Connecticut,I witnessed another rain of small frogs or toads which covered the ground and the top of my car.

FROM THE TRANSVAAL

Vol 9 Number 4,Issue Number 73, April 1956

"Maybe a poltergeist explains the appearance of a "dwarf-like beast" that walks upright and leaves spoor similar to a small child`s foot-marks in Port Alfred, Transvaal.

The Sunday Times of Johannesburg reported in September that the appearance of the creature is marked by screams in the night and the disappearance of pets.

A young girl who lives alone with her mother in an isolated cottage near town has seen the creature and said it looks like a dwarf with a large head. Her mother heard screams but did not see it.

Shades of the Bell Witch!

ANOTHER SEA SERPENT

Vol 9 Number 4,Issue Number 74, May 1956

" When you remember that the oceans cover three-quarters of the earth`s surface and that life in them can exist in layers from the surface to the lowest depths, it is not surprising that strange marine animals are constantly being discovered. Like the creature that washed up at Venice, California,in December. It was 16 feet long, had a snake—like head and fins, and originally weighed about 800 pounds.Was it a sea serpent? Joseph Korhummel of Redwood City saw a living animal last July that he thinks is the same species as the Venice creature.

Korhummel saw the beast caught in the shallows just off shore and climbed over the rocks to get a closer view. " I would have gotten closer but my wife was yelling at me to get away from there," Korhummel explained. "It was an awful looking thing. It looked about 16 feet long, I`d say."

THE BELLS TOLL

Vol 9 Number 4,Issue Number 74, May 1956

It was 3 a.m. last December 28 in Santa Monica, California, when the funeral bells of St. Monica`s church began to toll. Father John Sammon, who lives in the rectory next door, called police. With Msgr. O`Flaherty ,pastor, and the police, Father Sammon went to the church. The doors were locked. There was no evidence of a prowler. Somehow the switch controlling the bells had been turned on. The switch is in a locked steel cabinet.

SNOW MAN IN THE FRENCH ALPS

Vol 9 Number 4, Issue Number 73,April 1956

Britain`s Olympic skiers believe they have found tracks of an "abominable snowman" high in the French Alps. At 10,000 feet they found prints the size of a small dinner plate with clearly distinguishable pads and claws.

HAILE SELASSIE THE DOWSER

Vol 9, Number 4, Issue Number 73, April 1956

Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia has dowsed a successful water well near his palace after two wells drilled by an American well-drilling firm proved dry.

ICE FALLS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Vol 9, Number 6,Issue Number 75, June 1956

There wasn`t any hail or rain and the skies were absolutely clear about 8 p.m. in Jefferson Burrough near Large, Pennsylvania, one day early in January. William Dolan, operator of the Equitable Gas Company`s Tepe measuring station, and Fred Kunzeli, a worker at the station, went out in the yard to adjust values governing the flow of gas to customers in Pittsburgh. There they were—scattered over an area 150 feet in diameter—pieces of ice, looking like honeycombs, which apparently had fallen from the skies. The biggest chunk was basketball-size.

CROSS IN THE SKY

Vol 9, Number 3,Issue Number 72, March 1956

I have just read Walter M.Germain`s True Mystic Experience "Yuletide Vision" in the December issue of FATE. On two different occasions I have had the same experience.

On the night of VJ day (i.e. September 2nd 1945 in the U.S.) I accompanied my husband on a cream route (sic) he was driving at the time. This consisted of visiting numerous small towns within a radius of 150 miles, picking up 100-pound cans of cream and leaving empty cans

We drove west and north as we went from town to town. When it was time to return we drove south and east. All the stars were very bright that night, but I noticed that one star in the east seemed larger and more brilliant than the others. As I watched it became a cross. My eyes followed it as we turned south and then east again but it was always a huge, brilliant cross. I mentioned the cross to my hus-

-band ,but to him it was just a star. Two years later at Christmas I saw the star in the east again, and again it became a cross. Call it an illusion or what you will, but I believe it is a promise that he who believes in God need fear nothing.

PRACTICAL ESP IN A DOG

Volume 9,Number 4,Issue Number 74, May 1956

Ted and Dorothy Friend who write a column for the San Francisco Call Bulletin recently told the story of Welcome Lewis ,who came up from Los Angeles with her boxer dog. She drove over to Lafayette Park to exercise the pup.

"When I parked my car and tried to get him out, he refused to budge," she explained. "He barked and made a great fuss and I couldn`t move him an inch. In disgust I drove to my hotel—where he came out of the car as meek as a lamb. The next day I passed Lafayette Park and noted that a huge tree had fallen on a car in the precise place I had parked. I learned too that the tree had fallen only a few minutes after I had driven away and another car had driven in!"

LONG DISTANCE TRAVEL BY DOG

Volume 8, Number 7,Issue Number 64,July 1955

Paddy`s 1,800 Mile Trip When the Hugh Carson family moved from Ottawa to Edmonton,Canada,in 1951,they left their Irish setter, Paddy,with a friend. Since Paddy was unhappy and regularly left his new home to prowl around the former Carson residence, he was given to an Ottawa Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer. Recently,however,Paddy came bounding up to the Carson children as they played in their yard in Edmonton.How he made the 1,800-mile trip remains a mystery.